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SUBJECT: MEDIA PLAY - IRAQ

1. Sri Lanka's English-medium front pages found room for only two war-related headlines on 4/1: "U.S. pounds Baghdad, battles to the south," said one; "U.S. in first major clash with Republican guard" said the other. More -- and more strident -- headlines appeared on the vernacular front pages, however. "Iraq Information Ministry heavily damaged by missile attack, "Missile attacks Saddam's son's palace," and "America faces the Iraqi super force for the first time" said the Sinhala dailies, while the Tamil dailies led with headlines such as "Stiff resistance from Iraqi forces," "Four thousand suicide bombers ready to face coalition forces," and "U.S. Commanders say 'No hurry in capturing Baghdad.'"

2. Under the headline "Double standards on peace, the editors of the DAILY NEWS (government-owned English daily, islandwide circulation) wondered why some Sri Lankans are simultaneously pro-peace in Iraq and "deafeningly silent" regarding peace in Sri Lanka itself. Excerpts:

"... war involves killing and loss of life and this stark fact has to be bemoaned regardless of where it occurs.

"What leads us to these thoughts is the emergence of a perplexing mindset among some sections of local opinion on the question of peace in Sri Lanka. While these sections would, rightly, denounce the loss of life in the war in Iraq, they tend to be deafeningly silent on the moral correctness in ending the conflict in Sri Lanka by peaceful means.

"In other words, the very same sections are some of the most vociferous critics of the current peace process. A clear instance of double standards -- to say the least. It is this mental anomaly which led Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to observe recently at a rally in Matara that: 'Some sections among our people are against the war in Iraq, but the same people are against the peace process in Sri Lanka.'"

3. LANKADEEPA (independent Sinhala daily, islandwide circulation) writes an editorial to ask "What's the objective of war in Iraq war?" LANKADEEPA's answer: American imperialism. Excerpts:

"The U.S. has now launched a new imperialism. It is now the richest and most powerful nation on earth and won't let any other nation come close....

"Whatever the U.S.'s ulterior motive, the war is against a very helpless population, which suffered enough during the first Gulf War, which has gone homeless, suffered embargos.... What will become of them?"

Wills